

GOD AND TIME

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This book contains a dozen new essays on old theological problems.¹ The editors have sorted these problem into four categories, with four corresponding parts of the book: (I) God's Eternal Nature; (II) God, Time, and Creation; (III) The Nature of Divine Knowledge; and (IV) God's Relation to the World.

The issue in Part I concerns what it is for God to be eternal. Is it to be atemporal (that is, to exist outside of time) or is it to be everlasting (that is, to exist inside of time but at every moment of time)? If God is atemporal, this suggests he lacks temporal properties as well as properties that entail possession of temporal properties; this seems to threaten other divine attributes such as perfect knowledge, power, and goodness. If God is everlasting, however, then it seems he is mutable, which some of the contributors regard as an imperfection. Part II concerns the doctrine of the creation *ex nihilo* of the world. Does it require a temporal beginning to the universe? If creation is contingent and God is everlasting, might it be that God is nonetheless only contingently everlasting? Part III concerns a cluster of issues: whether foreknowledge and the possibility of prophecy are consistent with freedom; whether omniscience requires knowledge of what is happening now, and, if so, whether such knowledge is incompatible with atemporality; and whether God's knowledge is propositional. The bearing on the nature of divine eternity of God's interacting with the world—performing miracles, answering prayers, becoming incarnate—is the topic of Part IV. A key issue here, and also in connection with foreknowledge, is whether retrocausation—causation of an earlier event by a later event—is possible.

In addition to Ganssle's introduction and a paper of his, the book contains contributions from Brian Leftow, Garrett DeWeese, Alan G. Padgett, Dean W. Zimmerman, Quentin Smith, William Lane Craig, Edward Wierenga, William Hasker, Paul Helm, Thomas D. Senor, and Douglas K. Blount. The volume goes beyond the well-worn foreknowledge and freedom problem to bring out how new developments in the metaphysics of time relate to God's nature, particularly recent developments of the A-theory (the dynamic model) and the B-theory (the static model). I recommend it for any library supporting contemporary analytic metaphysics and philosophy of religion. What I want to do now is focus on some of the particular essays and the issues they raise.

The volume begins with an excellent paper by Brian Leftow. In 'The Eternal Present', he defends the coherence of the claim that God is not temporal yet is present. The key move for Leftow is introducing the idea of a 'typically temporal property' (TTP). Temporality, Leftow says, includes a cluster of

1. *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature*, edited by Gregory E. Ganssle and David M. Woodruff (Oxford University Press, 2002. xii + 252 pp. £45.00).



TTPs—being past, being present, being future, standing in ‘and-then’ relationships—but an event (Leftow takes it that events are the primary possessors of temporality) need not have all of the TTPs to count as temporal, and an item can have some TTPs without itself being temporal. It is a false dichotomy to say God either has all of the TTPs or none of them; “there is in fact a continuum of possible views of God’s relation to time” (p. 23) and even most of those who hold God is eternal think God’s life has some TTPs.

Leftow attributes just such a view to Boethius. On the dynamic conception of time, the ‘now’ has a metaphysical spotlight on it, yet for Boethius “the spotlight of the present stands still on events in God’s life” (p. 23). We see here that God has a TTP; there are answers to when-questions about God, namely ‘now’ and ‘always’. Furthermore, God’s life contains events, and so has another TTP, yet this does not necessarily make God temporal since we can make sense of the idea of a non-temporal event. To see this, Leftow defends the idea of instantaneous events. Their possibility shows that “not all events need to be processes of change, or need to begin” (p. 25). Comings-into-being and ceasings-to exist are non-change events. For comings-into-being, the subject of the event did not exist prior to the occurrence of the event; for ceasings-to-exist, the subject will not exist subsequently. Such events cannot properly be said to involve a change in the subject. From this we get the possibility of instantaneous events—events that neither have parts continuing past their first instant nor have parts preceding their last instant. Such an event would have no beginning, have no end, and involve no change. Furthermore, this event is permanent; that is, it is present but never past nor future. Such an event would seem not have the right sort of TTPs to count as temporal. Leftow concludes “neither ‘God exists in an eternal present’ nor ‘God exists in an eternal now’ appear to entail a contradiction. . . . [they] are *prima facie* coherent” (p. 40).

In ‘Divine Foreknowledge and the Arrow of Time: On the Impossibility of Retrocausation’, Alan Padgett argues the concept of retrocausation—of ‘bringing about the past’—is incoherent and hence cannot be employed in any solution to the problem of divine foreknowledge and human freedom. (To deny the possibility of *retrocausation* is not to deny other possible ‘retro’ relationships such as the retrosatisfaction of truth conditions for propositions about the future; Padgett is clear that he does not mean to shut down all avenues to a solution of the foreknowledge/freedom problem.) What’s wrong with retrocausation? Divide possible worlds into three types: timeless worlds, worlds in which time is dynamic (worlds to which the A-theory of time applies), and worlds in which time is static (B-theory worlds). Obviously there is no retrocausation in timeless worlds, since there are no temporal separations in such a world.

For dynamic worlds, Padgett rests his case on “the causal impassibility and impotence of the unreal” (p. 67). Since the future is not real in such worlds, it is causally impotent; there’s no room for retrocausation in such worlds. Padgett gets a bit sloppy here. “Part of what we mean when we say something is real is that it can, at least in principle, causally interrelate with other things,” he says (p. 69). “So part of what we mean when we affirm that something is



unreal simply is that it is causally impotent and impassible.” This is a *non sequitur*; to say that B is part of the meaning of A is not to say not-B is part of the meaning of not-A. Furthermore, it is far from clear that this is part of what we mean by ‘real’ and ‘unreal’. Platonists, for one, accord full reality to numbers, propositions, etc., even though such entities (most Platonists think) lack causal powers. Perhaps part of what we mean by ‘unreal’ is ‘causally impotent and impassible’, but Padgett hasn’t given a good argument to show it.

Static worlds are the tough case for Padgett. First, to count genuinely as *retrocausation*, there must be some ontologically real direction to time, beyond mere temporal order. Static worlds in which this condition is not met (such as the Gödel universe) simply aren’t candidates for the occurrence of retrocausation. Padgett examines two theories about what grounds the arrow of time and finds retrocausation is impossible on both of them. The first theory—that causal relationships ground the arrow of time—is obviously a non-starter for the proponent of retrocausation. The second—that entropy increase does the job—is, in my opinion, too quickly dismissed. Padgett says no later event B could cause an earlier event A on this picture because to do so would require an entropy-*decreasing* expenditure of energy on the part of the objects involved. It may be true that for one physical event to be the cause of another, there must be an increase in energy (an expenditure of work) in the transaction. But what of mental causation? In a context that is relevant to the issue of libertarian free will, it seems natural to consider worlds in which the causal relationships are not restricted to physical-to-physical ones. Perhaps there could be a world with a real arrow of time in virtue of the increase in entropy of its physical parts, yet in which a mental event (say, a prayer at 3:00 p.m. that a babysitter remembered to feed one’s child at 2:00 p.m.) could cause a prior mental event without adding to the overall entropy of the world. This seems to me to open the door to retrocausation, even if a static world has an arrow of time through entropic increase. Padgett needs to address this relevant possibility if he wants to nail down his case against retrocausation.

In ‘Timelessness out of Mind: On the Alleged Incoherence of Divine Timelessness’, Edward Wierenga defends atemporalism against the newly orthodox position that God is everlasting. Wierenga claims (p. 153) that “the main considerations in favor of divine temporality, it seems to me, are *objections* to divine eternity”—namely, that if God is eternal, he cannot know propositions involving temporal indexicals (‘today’, ‘now’) and he cannot bring about effects that are in time. Wierenga makes several fine points in connection with the first objection. First, the implicit premise of the temporal indexicals objection is that if we know P, then God knows P, yet this is far from obvious. Wierenga points out (p. 155) that “Hardly anyone accepts the parallel claim for omnipotence, that if God is omnipotent he can do anything that any of us can do”. Plausibly, the troublesome propositions are *perspectival* ones—ones believed at a certain index (for example, the proposition ‘I am typing’ is believed at the index <Manson, 6:00 p.m. CST on July 22, 2004>). But of course God couldn’t know *that* proposition without being Manson. That ignorance should be no more of a problem for God than the inability of God to take his parents out for dinner.

Next, the objection that an atemporal God could not bring about effects in time hinges on whether there is something wrong with the idea of atemporal causation. Wierenga addresses Swinburne's two arguments to this effect. Swinburne's first objection rests on the metaphysical principle (quoted on p. 157) that "every even . . . happens over a period of time and never at an instant of time, or is analyzable in terms of things happening over periods of time". Swinburne defends this by showing how to analyse talk of an object's possessing a property at an instant in terms of an object's possessing a property over an interval of time. Yet just because some such talk can be so analysed does not mean all such talk can be; Wierenga offers statements about the instantaneous velocities of objects as resistant to such an analysis. After reading this paper and Leftow's, I have to agree that the concept of an instantaneous event is coherent and, in fact, has everyday applications. If there are good arguments against atemporal causation, they should not rely on the impossibility of instantaneous events.

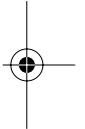
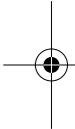
In 'Direct Awareness and God's Experience of a Temporal Now' Ganssle defends William Alston's view that God's knowledge of the facts of the world does not consist in his believing true propositions with justification plus whatever it takes to satisfy Gettier worries, but rather consists of direct intuitive awareness of the facts. The idea here is that God's knowledge is not representational at all; God's knowledge does not consist of taking a certain attitude (believing) toward a proposition, with the proposition representing some fact about the world. After giving two reasons for endorsing Alston's position on divine knowledge, Ganssle looks at the implications of that position for questions about God's relation to time.

It seems to me, however, that whatever problems omniscience creates for God's relation to time, similar problems will remain even if we adopt Alston's view. I think this because I think taking attitudes toward propositions is going to be part of God's mental life even if it is not part of God's knowing the world. If we assume non-actual possible worlds are simply sets of propositions and if we buy into the standard picture of creation whereby God considers all of the possible worlds and actualises one than which none is better, then God judges some possible worlds to be worse than others. That act of judgement seems to introduce propositional attitudes into God's mental life. Now consider God's judgement that the actual world ('Alpha') is better than another world, 'Orange'—which is a world consisting of just an orange. Of course, Orange doesn't *really* consist of just an orange—not at all. Orange is a set of proposition—say, the conjunction of all of the truths of logic and mathematics, of all of the synthetic necessities (if there are any such things), and of the proposition 'There is exactly one orange' (or something to this effect). Now Orange, being an abstract object, is not an appropriate candidate for immediate awareness—not unless we radically expand the meaning of 'immediate awareness' (or so it seems to me). When God compares Alpha to Orange, one of the items he holds before his mind is a set of propositions—namely, Orange—and the item is just not the sort of thing of which there is immediate awareness. So how could God compare Alpha to Orange without the other item in the comparison also being a set of propositions? Even if Alpha is *known*



immediately and non-propositionally, it still seems (to me, at least) that within God's mind there is also going to have to be a propositional representation of Alpha. And then (I suspect) the existence of this representation will reintroduce all of the old problems that Alston's model was meant to solve.

In 'The Absence of a Timeless God' William Hasker also seeks to undermine the idea that, if we can just conceive of God's knowledge as immediately intuited rather than representational, we can make sense of God's being both atemporal and omniscient. Hasker elaborates an argument he has given elsewhere that "the conception of divine intuitive timeless knowledge of temporal realities is incoherent" (p. 185) and addresses replies to this argument from Leftow, Alston, and Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann. Hasker's case is rich and lively, motivated by a distaste for atemporalism—a position he regards as "profoundly inconsistent with the thoroughly temporal and historical outlook that permeates the biblical text" and "a doctrine that has in it so much of pagan speculation and so little that is biblical and Christian" (p. 202). Such passions indicate the atemporality/everlastingness dispute will not be resolved any time soon.



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